DAWN

OPINION

Politics of hate

HATE speech against Muslims in India is no longer sporadic. It is organised and increasingly led by those in power. A new report by the India Hate Lab documents 1,318 hate speech events across the country in 2025 — an average of four a day — with Muslims the main targets in almost every case. This is a pattern that reflects how politics in India is now being done. What stands out is where this hate is happening. Nearly nine out of 10 incidents took place in states ruled by the BJP or its allies. In opposition-run states, such incidents fell sharply. That contrast matters. Law and order is the state's responsibility, and the data shows clearly that where the BJP governs, hate is allowed to flourish. This is also no longer limited to election seasons. Even in a non-election year, hate speech remained high and widespread. That signals a shift. Communal hostility is no longer just a tool to mobilise voters; it has become part of everyday governance. Rallies, religious processions and public meetings are repeatedly used to paint Muslims as outsiders, threats or enemies within.

The language used is not just offensive, it is dangerous. Nearly a quarter of recorded speeches openly called for violence. Others urged social and economic boycotts, demanded the demolition of mosques and churches, or encouraged people to arm themselves. Muslims were regularly described as "parasites", "termites" or "invaders". Such words strip people of their humanity and make violence easier to justify. Senior BJP leaders feature prominently in this ecosystem. Chief ministers, cabinet ministers and party figures were among the most frequent speakers. They promoted conspiracy theories such as "love jihad", "population jihad" and "vote jihad" — claims that Muslims are secretly plotting to dominate India through marriage, childbirth or elections. These ideas have no basis in fact, but they serve a political purpose: to turn fear into votes and prejudice into policy.

The BJP often claims it cannot control what fringe groups say. But the report shows a clear division of labour. Allied organisations mobilise on the ground, while political leaders set the tone from above. Police action is rare. Social media platforms amplify the speeches. The result is impunity. The cost of this strategy is high. It weakens India's constitutional promise of equality, deepens social divisions and puts millions of Muslims at risk of discrimination and violence. It also damages India's standing as a democracy governed by the rule of law at a time when global scrutiny is intensifying. Hate does not spread by accident. It spreads when those in power find it useful and refuse to stop it. India's leadership must decide whether it will pull the country back from this path, or continue to lead it down a darker one.

Visa checks

IT is a pragmatic response to the various immigration-related issues that had been accumulating. On Tuesday, Pakistan and the UAE agreed to pursue a formal agreement on pre-immigration clearance for Pakistanis travelling to the Gulf state, with a pilot to be launched at the Karachi airport. If this arrangement materialises, those travelling to the UAE will complete immigration formalities in Pakistan before their departure, which will allow them to avoid processing upon arrival in the UAE and, possibly, exit airports quickly. On the other hand, the UAE authorities will benefit from enhanced border security as Pakistani officials will, in effect, be helping them curb visa misuse. It is positive that Pakistan is moving towards this arrangement as it has a large diaspora population in the UAE, which sends vital remittances. The Gulf nation is a major destination for our labour exports, and the initiative comes amid long-standing visa restrictions and processing delays for citizens wishing to travel to the UAE. As trust is gradually restored between the authorities of both nations, it is hoped that the unofficial restrictions placed on issuance of visas over the past few years will ease, allowing for easier travel.

Pakistani authorities should be aware of what the UAE expects. There had reportedly been numerous complaints from Emirati authorities about Pakistanis overstaying their visit visas, engaging in unauthorised work or resorting to begging. It was these frustrations, one may surmise, that eventually led to visa restrictions being tightened for Pakistani travellers. The UAE will expect that the Pakistani officials screening travellers at the airports will profile visa holders appropriately and prevent miscreants from boarding a plane. A preliminary form of this vetting mechanism was introduced a few months ago, but it gave rise to much discontentment as the process was not adequately structured or transparent. Over 66,000 passengers heading to different destinations were offloaded in 2025 by the FIA's own account. Many complained they were offloaded arbitrarily. Now that they will be screening formally, immigration authorities here will need to step up their service delivery to ensure a smooth experience for legitimate passengers. There should be no more frustration, even as strict security standards are maintained. If executed well, the arrangement could serve as a model for bilateral agreements with other Gulf states that have complained of similar issues.

Potato exports

THE federal decision to permit potato exports to Pakistan's main markets — Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond — through Iran is unlikely to offer any tangible relief to growers and traders, given logistical bottlenecks and very high freight costs. The route's viability is further undermined by the additional 25pc US tariffs imposed on countries trading with or via Tehran. The move follows demands from growers in Punjab that the government subsidise potato exports to stabilise the domestic market. The gravity of the matter can be gauged from reports of farmers ploughing standing crops back into the soil. This also reveals the absence of effective agricultural market stabilisation mechanisms.

The trigger of the crisis is unmistakable: a supply glut caused by surplus output coinciding with disruption in exports to and through Afghanistan due to cross-border trade closure, which has not only halted exports to Afghanistan — Pakistan's largest potato market — for months now, but also stalled trade with Central Asia and beyond. The numbers illustrate the scale of the crisis. In 2023, Pakistan exported potatoes worth $140m, with Afghanistan absorbing 41pc of the volume. In 2024, the exports were valued at $138m, with 42pc again going to Afghanistan. Potato is our largest vegetable by area and production; the sudden loss of these markets has created an export vacuum that the domestic market cannot absorb. Besides, it exposes the fragility of our agricultural export model, one which is reactive rather than strategic. While the government's position that security concerns had necessitated border closures is valid, the economic consequences of such decisions cannot be overlooked. The permission to use the Iranian route for potato exports shows that the authorities are aware of the costs of the Afghan border closure to the economy: tens of thousands of households depend on trade with Afghanistan but cannot find a solution. Unless Islamabad moves away from ad hoc crisis management to strategic trade reforms, policy responses will remain ineffective.

BY ALI TAUQEER SHEIKH

Pakistan's climate moment

America's withdrawal from the UN climate treaty must be treated as an opportunity.

AMERICAN President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the UNFCCC has created a crisis for global multilateralism and international climate governance. The challenge is paradoxical: protecting relations with the US without abandoning multilateralism and climate commitments. This dilemma will reshape Pakistan's domestic and international climate architecture. What opportunities can emerge for Pakistan from this crisis? How can Pakistan benefit from a new redistribution of power and resources? Can it navigate this shift to diversify partnerships, secure climate finance and advance economic and strategic interests amid global realignment?Global fallout: The US is the only nation to completely withdraw from international climate efforts. The UNFCCC is a bedrock treaty that underpins every climate negotiation, emissions commitment and dollar of climate finance that flows from the developed to the developing world. The decision extends to the IPCC that has provided the authoritative voice on climate science for decades. This will diminish the quality and comprehensiveness of future assessments, particularly in complex areas of importance like agricultural emissions and land-use change.

The withdrawal undermines the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities that has been the moral foundation of Pakistan's climate negotiations since Rio in 1992. The US as the largest historical contributor to greenhouse gases bears a unique responsibility for the warming that threatens billions of lives and livelihoods. By walking away, Washington sends an unmistakable message: the world's most powerful economy will prioritise short-term political expediency over planetary survival.

Europe has responded with a mixture of moral indignation and pragmatic determination, making it clear that European climate ambition will continue unabated. The European Green Deal, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and continental commitments to net-zero by 2050 proceed regardless of US participation. In effect, Europe is preparing to lead a climate coalition without its traditional transatlantic partner.

Perhaps the most significant geopolitical consequence is the vacuum created for China, which has already positioned itself as a champion of multilateralism and international cooperation. The US exit hands China an unprecedented opportunity to claim leadership on the defining challenge of the 21st century. Former climate envoy John Kerry rightly called Trump's decision "a gift to China".

China dominates the supply chains for solar panels, wind turbines and electric vehicle batteries. It leads in renewable energy (RE) deployment and clean technology innovation. By maintaining its commitment to the UNFCCC while Washington retreats, China can leverage green diplomacy, based on its experience with Pakistan, to strengthen ties with developing nations, present itself as a responsible global power, and capture the economic benefits of the estimated $23 trillion clean technology market.

This presents a delicate challenge for Pakistan that has carefully balanced its ties between Washington and Beijing. The US exit tilts that balance. If climate cooperation increasingly flows through Chinese channels through initiatives like Panda or Dim Sum Bonds, CPEC, and the BRI or bilateral agreements, Pakistan might be drawn further into Beijing's orbit, with all the economic and strategic dependencies that it entails.Pakistan's moment: For Pakistan, these developments arrive at a moment of vulnerability. The catastrophic 2022 floods offered a glimpse of our climate future: one-third of the country underwater, 33 million people affected, economic losses exceeding $30bn. Our updated NDCs require an estimated $565bn by 2035, the vast majority of which must come from international sources. What, then, should Pakistan do in the face of the US exit? We must pursue a strategy grounded in diplomatic diversification, domestic mobilisation and regional cooperation.

First, we must diversify our climate partnerships. The EU and UK have recommitted to climate action and international cooperation, despite budgetary pressures. They should become our primary partners for technical assistance, technology transfer and climate finance. We should aggressively leverage our green taxonomy to attract European capital while advancing our own emissions reduction goals. The CBAM, rather than being feared as a trade barrier, should be seen as an incentive to accelerate our own decarbonisation.

Second, we must recognise that America's exit makes China an even more critical partner. The CPEC already includes RE projects, but we should push for cutting-edge, greening investments. We should insist on offshore solar and wind parks, mass transit systems and hydroelectric projects that enhance our energy sovereignty while meeting our climate commitments. This requires difficult conversations with Beijing, but our leverage lies in framing climate action as economic modernisation rather than environmental virtue.

Third, we must accelerate domestic resource mobilisation, instead of waiting for international finance to materialise. Simultaneously, we should work towards aligning with China's domestic emissions trading market as we develop our own local ecosystem for carbon trading. This will build institutional readiness and encourage cleaner industrial practices. Finally, we must expand our Panda Bond portfolio to reach $5bn by 2030 to support such projects as the Living Indus Initiative and climate-resilient agriculture.

Fourth, we should revitalise regional cooperation in South, Central and Southwest Asia through platforms like SCO. Regardless of US participation, we share common threats that demand common responses. Regional trading systems and resuming the Indus Waters Treaty can still proceed with Washington's blessing.

Finally, we must recalibrate our diplomatic approach to the US itself. The Trump administration clearly favours bilateral deals over multilateral commitments and frames issues through the lens of national security. When engaging with Washington, we should present our climate needs as infrastructure, job creation and security projects that advance mutual interests, rather than as environmental obligations.The longer view: The US exit from the UNFCCC won't last forever. When the US rejoins, nations that maintained commitments will be remembered. Pakistan should be among them. This crisis creates an opportunity: international climate architecture including UNFCCC, IPCC and the Paris Agreement will survive, but power and resources will be redistributed. Pakistan must navigate this shift strategically, not passively, to advance development and avoid becoming collateral damage. ■

The writer is a climate change and sustainable development expert.

BY KHURRAM HUSAIN

End of stability

AROUND the same time last year, I wrote the economy has reached what I called "peak stability". This was a stage where all the measures taken to stabilise the economy had delivered their results, and had now reached the end of their line. A few indicators had begun to show a little stress, but around the middle of the year, in June 2025 specifically, a large inflow of almost $5.25 billion suddenly shored up the reserves and allowed the government to end the fiscal year with their State Bank reserves almost $500 million above the target set in the IMF programme.

2025 saw a moderate trade deficit and surging remittances, which helped the current account balance significantly. Between January and November, the months for which data is available, the trade deficit came in around $30.5bn while remittances (including other transfers) came in at $38.8bn. Seems like a nice balance there, until you realise that something ate up $8bn out of the balance-of-payments because the overall surplus was just about $263m.

That something was interest payments on external debts. In 11 months of 2025, Pakistan paid $7.1bn in interest payments on its external debt. For almost a decade, from 2013 to 2022, this figure oscillated between $1.5bn to $4.0bn. Then it began to climb. Some of the increase was due to rising interest rates as the returns on 10-year US Treasury paper spiked from a Covid-era low of 1.44 per cent to 4.35pc in 2025. This was a sharp hike without doubt, and it weighed heavily on the balance-of-payments of all countries.

But in Pakistan's case there was something more. In June of every year for the past few years, Pakistan has been borrowing heavily from private commercial lenders in the closing month of the fiscal year to shore up its reserves. In June 2023 and 2024, for example, they borrowed almost a billion dollars from commercial creditors. Then came June 2025 and this figure leapt to $3.4bn, nearly 65pc of the inflows of that month.

The story is quite simple. Pakistan has balanced its external account by throttling its external trade, choking its economy and heavy borrowing, including private borrowing. Since 2023, for example, total private commercial borrowing by the country has been $7.5bn. It is not known what the maturity of these loans was, and therefore not possible to say how much has been retired and how much is still on the stock of total external debt now. But the scale of borrowing from private commercial lenders has increased massively in the past few years, just as the current account deficit has also diminished massively, if not disappeared altogether for many months at a stretch.

> A stagnant economy cannot afford high prices, high taxes and high debt burdens for long.

The stability in the economy cannot last much longer however. It has been earned via high taxes, a high energy price burden due to misplaced investments in the energy sector coupled with massive misgovernance. It has also been sustained through expensive borrowing, reflected at least in part by the rising burden of interest payments the economy is carrying. A stagnant economy cannot afford high prices, high taxes and high debt burdens for long.

In truth, we had hit peak stability a year ago. That was the moment to start transitioning out from stabilisation towards growth, on the back of some sort of reform agenda. But no reforms came. Nothing happened. The government was content to simply proclaim success on the back of stabilisation alone, thinking its job was done. All of 2025 was a grind, as a result, slogging ahead in a high-cost, high-tax and high-debt environment, with no end in sight.

All governments in the past have done what they are going to do in the first year or two of their tenure. Whether it was the signature reform of the federation through the 18th Amendment and the associated NFC Award in 2009 of the PPP government, or the CPEC investments and associated growth spurt of the PML-N government from 2013 to 2018, the work was largely done in the first two years, and in the latter case, took the another two years before the ribbons started being cut on the highways and power plants. The Musharraf regime spent two years stabilising the economy, and unfurled its reforms in 2002 via the telecom sector, the power reforms, and the privatisations.

But the present government has spent its first two years doing nothing discernible. And now they announce the return of Mr Ishaq Dar as the exports czar, as the man who will be tasked with bringing about an export surge from here forward. This ought to be easy for him. During his finance ministership, Pakistan's exports plummeted. Maybe, if he does the opposite of whatever he did while in power we will have an export surge.

By now, announcements are coming with an increasing regularity, of a new committee or a new goal being set. But it is too little, too late. By now it has become clear that this government cannot punch its way out of this paper bag. They are stuck in a gruelling adjustment, weighing heavily on the citizenry and on owners of capital alike. They have juiced this lemon for all it is worth. From here on, some sort of a vision needs to kick in. Some way to unlock the growth potential of Pakistan that is tied down by layers and layers of mismanagement, bad pricing and bad legacy. But there is nothing.

The only way they can end this economic stalemate is with some sort of bilateral or other external injection of liquidity. It was the same way the Musharraf regime did it. Except they had 9/11 as the bonanza. We wait to see what these guys will get. ■

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